NICHOLAS ALAHVERDIAN

# DREADING AND HOPING ALL



**Nicholas Alahverdian**

Survivor of Torture.
Harvard Scholar.
Child Welfare Advocate.

1987-2020

*Memorial Edition*

# DREADING AND HOPING ALL



***Hope***, the painting on the cover of *Dreading and Hoping All* by Nicholas Alahverdian, is a painting by George Frederic Watts, completed in 1886. The painting shows a lone blindfolded woman sitting on a globe, playing a harp that has only a single string remaining. The background features a single star.

As early as the 1640s, an image of an anchor and the word "hope" were found on the Seal of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, and the Seal's words and emblems were likely inspired by the biblical phrase "hope we have as an anchor of the soul," found in Hebrews, Verse 6:18-19. The anchor remains on the Flag and Seal of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, as does the word "Hope" which is also the State's motto.

The two full verses, which had special meaning for Mr. Alahverdian are: "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."

With hope as our anchor, we can accomplish all things. Survival, proof of our soul's desire to burst forth with life, must be inextricably linked to hope if we are to subsist in the beauty and melancholic existence on this earth.

ALSO BY

NICHOLAS ALAHVERDIAN

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*The Beauty of the End, the Hope of the Beginning*

COMING SOON

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*The Chronicles*
*Volume II*

*The Chronicles: Volume I*

# DREADING AND HOPING ALL

NICHOLAS ALAHVERDIAN



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Second Edition

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*To Patricia*
*With colossal gratitude for everything you did within your power to rescue me from the depths of hell — twice.*

Many times he died,
Many times rose again.

—William Butler Yeats, "Death"



NICHOLAS

ALAHVERDIAN

# INTRODUCTION

This is the first volume of a series of microbooks I am calling "The Chronicles." In the pages and volumes that follow, I hope to share my experience for the benefit of various audiences and readers. Whether you are a social worker, an adult who was once an orphan, policymaker, politician, researcher, student, or simply want to know what it's like to grow up without parents and in a broken state system, this series is for you. This series has been in the planning stages for over five years. With each volume, you will most certainly want to read the next.

I've battled with myself for over a decade on how and when to write my memoirs about significant life events such as growing up as an orphan and simultaneously working for the government, and the amazing adventures that followed after I was released from that Minotaur of an unforgiving system.

Experiences that glow in my mind of which I am proud, include attending Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, advising legislators in Washington, D.C., at the Rhode Island Capitol and State Houses across the east coast, and being invited to speak at universities, various federal agencies, think tanks and nongovernmental organizations. I would also write about the ultimate highlight of my life thus far: being invited to regular

dinners and conferences with my professor, Harvard advisor, and friend, Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney, one of the greatest writers and poets of all time.

As I have advanced in age, however, and realized that my peak in advocacy and political activism is long gone, it became necessary to find a workable solution with which to document my vast array of experiences before they fade away as a result of the curse of age and fading memory.

Microbooks have provided that solution. I define a microbook as a book that is 25-125 pages long. It is easier for both author and reader. You will soon see why, especially when the subject matter is so difficult, 30 pages about how group homes can implement security measures to eliminate tortuous or abusive behavior perpetrated by employees is incredibly important.

Besides, sitting down at a desk and laboring over an epic tome concerning each of my experiences ranging from abuse and torture at the hands of group home employees all the way to when I started studying at Harvard University simply wouldn't be practical. If I were to take a linear approach (in other words, following a historical timeline approach from beginning to end) to documenting my experiences, I would be making an unwise decision. The book would never be finished.

The symptoms of my post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) would be exacerbated beyond repair. And my life would be profoundly impacted. My young and growing

family would suffer, and that would be most unfair to them, especially for past events that they cannot control.

Thus, I began to consult with friends and colleagues about how to best go about documenting what I consider to be valuable information about my life, what I've learned, and, most importantly, the past, current, and future infrastructural status of the State of Rhode Island's Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and how to bring about the permanent amelioration of this agency for the benefit of Rhode Island's children and families.

The DCYF is the broken foster care/juvenile justice/child "protection" system in the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations (it's universally characterized as "broken" by everyone: including the Rhode Island General Assembly, lobbyist firms, the State of Rhode Island's Office of the Child Advocate, nongovernmental organizations, and even the federal government).

Perhaps the adjective "broken" is far too nice. For starters, Jeffrey B. Liebman, Ph.D. of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University has dubbed the Rhode Island DCYF as the "most messed up agency" that he's encountered — ever. And he knows a broken system when he sees one.

Dr. Liebman, an economist by training, served as an economic advisor to the 2008 presidential campaign of then-Senator Barack Obama. He later went on to serve as

the associate executive director and chief economist of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in the Obama Administration.

Dr. Liebman's words are now recited in most Providence Journal op-eds and other media articles about the agency because it's a great hook — albeit a very unfortunate one — for a news story. The Department's constant stream of bad news — unqualified employees, deaths or near-deaths of children in its care, and closures of group homes are becoming more and more frequent.

The issues in the press merely form the tip of the iceberg. Whistleblowers, researchers, victims, and the agency itself are confirming what I and others have been claiming for over 20 years. Our words, once dismissed by some at the State House as exaggerations or even impossible, are finally being accepted as truth.

The people that call for DCYF reform are no longer the tinfoil-hat-wearing-"sky is falling"-shouting maniacs that longtime DCYF demagogues like Government Affairs/ Perpetual Assistant to the Director Mike Burk and Legal Counsel Kevin Aucoin wanted us to be characterized as. And that is exactly how it should be — because the time for dying children is over. The time for abuse is over. And the time for negligence is over.

Michael Burk (Mike Burk) has been a senior DCYF employee for over 20 years. If I could compare him to

anyone in world history, my immediate answer would be that the power in his role is tantamount to that which was afforded to former Vice President Dick Cheney. Burk is a "vice" or an "assistant" in name only. Just like Cheney, Burk wielded the real power behind the Office of the Director at DCYF, and throughout the tenures of Directors Jay Lindgren, Patricia Martinez, Janice DeFrances, Jamia McDonald (a statutorily unqualified bureaucrat, donor and political friend of R.I. Governor Gina Raimondo who was appointed to the position in violation of Rhode Island law), and Trista Piccola.

With his octopus-esque tentacular reach across the Department and long arm to the State House as the Department's official lobbyist, as well as being an active member in Rhode Island State and City of Tiverton Democratic Party politics, Burk is able to exert his monstrous influence across all decisions, policies, and actions made by the Department. A full history will be given in a volume of *The Orphan Chronicles Series* with a significant and detailed portion being devoted to the multitudinous interactions that I have had the misfortune of having with Mr. Burk.

What I will say about Mike Burk at this moment is that if he was removed from the Department tomorrow, the Department would feel positive effects almost immediately. His harmful policy actions aimed at children and families coupled with his disdain for the population he is meant to serve is detrimental to his ability to meet the fundamental requirements of the role in which he currently occupies.

We are on the RMS Titanic and we have been shouting "ICEBERG! DEAD AHEAD!" for twenty years while they laugh as they collect their paycheck and pension. They are not laughing as hard now since the Rhode Island General Assembly and the Providence market media are beginning to accelerate their coverage on each tragedy that occurs on a nearly weekly basis at the Department, but I can assure you that Burk (2020 salary: > $110,000.00) and Aucoin (2020 salary: > $155,000.00) are still suppressing a slight giggle as they deposit their six figure salaries while they continue to watch Director after Director resign or get fired while they are the ones truly to blame for this crisis that has been 25+ years in the making.

Each integral decision that has involved deaths, near-deaths, abuse, negligence, covered-up press stories, leaked stories about fake DCYF successes, mismanagement of grant funds, and many others which will be covered in further Orphan Chronicles volumes — all of them lead straight back to Michael S. Burk and Kevin J. Aucoin. If anyone in Rhode Island state politics wants to make a dent in the disaster that is the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, whether you want it to be a financial dent, moral dent, leadership dent, ethical dent — and you want to be remembered for doing the right thing — call for these two pinheads to resign.

And I just so happened to have had a front-row seat to witness the inner workings of this very agency of which we speak — with Burk and Aucoin whom I lovingly refer to as

Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum — leading the Department as its true authoritative figures. But this isn't limited to just Burk and Aucoin. I came to intimately know the DCYF behemoth from both the inside as an orphan who lived it, and on the outside as a state employee in the Rhode Island General Assembly who supervised and oversaw its budget, successes, failures, and other activities.

I was first appointed as a Rhode Island General Assembly page at age 14 and then promoted as a special legislative aide in the House of Representatives, reporting to Speaker of the House John Harwood, his majority leader and successor to the Speakership Gordon D. Fox, and them his successor William Murphy. More directly, my day-to-day briefings and services were provided to Representatives Beatrice Lanzi, Rene Menard, Paul Moura, Joanne Giannini, David Cicilline, and others. These duties mainly consisted of drafting legislation, communicating with constituents, gathering bills to be reviewed for a day's particular legislative session, performing research on issues and stakeholders inherent in the legislation, and fulfilling any other responsibilities as required or requested.

I completed the latter of these two roles at the same time I was placed in the custody of the Department following my maternal grandfather's death. His death had a profound impact on our family, and my mother resorted to unhealthy habits that began to impact the lives of her children.

I was removed from the family home and placed in the in the infamous DCYF night-to-night program as a result of my mother's drinking and drug use, with my brother and sister soon to follow.

After spending a short time in DCYF shelters and then in the night-to-night program, I realized that the agency was in pandemonium. The only way I could be effective was to be a conduit through which the legislators could know what was really going on at the Department and inside the group homes and shelters with which it contracted. There were endless fights. Missed meals. No schooling was provided, or it was sporadic at best. Medical appointments were rarely kept. And employees of shelters and group homes were using state money and resources for their personal use.

When I discovered the extent of the problems surrounding DCYF and its widely-condemned night-to-night program, I made the very difficult decision to take a leave of absence from my employment with the State of Rhode Island and form my own nonprofit lobbying firm to advocate for the rights of children and adolescents who were orphans — some would use the pejorative term "wards of the state" as if the child or adolescent had done something wrong to get into this predicament — under the care and custody of the Rhode Island DCYF.

I had very simple goals: I wanted every orphan to be able to go to one school and remain in that school for the

entire academic year. I wanted every orphan to be able to receive adequate medical care. I wanted every orphan to have the right to be able to participate in extra-curricular and academic activities in an effort to assist them to prepare for university. I wanted each orphan to be able to be placed in the least restrictive setting possible (which is already a federal law, Rhode Island simply chooses not to follow this law), with an eye towards family reunification for a child with a stable family within one year or, alternatively, if a child didn't have a safe home to which they could return, a permanent or semi-permanent foster home or foster-to-adopt scenario.

Apparently, making these recommendations made me public enemy number one within the State of Rhode Island's Department of Children Youth and Families — especially with Mike Burk and Kevin Aucoin. Burk even went to Deputy Majority Whip Rene Menard's office. Mike sat the three of us down where he tried to claim that my employment and subsequent lobbying at the Rhode Island State House was "risking the Department's ability to find me a safe, permanent placement." Representative Menard respectfully told Burk to "go fuck yourself" and that if he "ever had any hesitancy to find a child or teenager a safe placement then he should find a new job". That was the end of that conversation — and Mike Burk's attempts to get me to stop going to the State House to fight for basic rights such as schooling, healthcare, a bed to sleep in, and the right to work.

Burk ultimately had to work directly with Chief Judge Jeremiah and Governor Donald Carcieri to circumnavigate the entire Rhode Island General Assembly who apparently — while I had disappeared to Nebraska and to Florida where I was prohibited from communicating with any elected officials — were under the impression that I was in a safe foster home and thriving in Massachusetts. Huh?

Mike Burk told each legislator that asked — and there were quite a few, I later discovered — a little white lie that I was in a foster home an hour north while I was in fact in Nebraska and Florida being tortured, raped, beaten, prevented from preparing for university, and overmedicated to the point of dystonic reactions and inability to form complete sentences. Again, all of this will be addressed in further volumes of The Orphan Chronicles.

But before those unlucky days were to occur in late 2003 until mid 2005, I began to take pride in being an advocate for what I knew and felt in my heart was right. I felt a sense of pride when the Secretary of State called me into his office and informed me that I was youngest registered lobbyist in American history at age 15. Politics was an amazing thing, but it wasn't the accolades that got me hooked. It was the legislative process and the different branches of government, which seemed to ensure that our democracy was the perfect system for our republic.

Politics for me was what a first cigarette must be for some people. I couldn't put it down; once I tried one, I was

hooked. Politics became my lifeblood, and I had found a purpose. And as former Providence Mayor Vincent A. "Buddy" Cianci, Jr. had later taught me, politics was a blood sport — especially in Rhode Island — and if you did the right thing, knew how to poll the right people, and clearly articulate your platform, the voters would naturally join you or your cause as long as you could outwit and outsmart your opponent.

I had found a solution to my existential crisis. I began to think that the United States Constitution and the Constitution of the State of Rhode Island were two of the most divinely-inspired documents that had ever graced the eyes of man. I began to revere the Founding Fathers. My naivety was nearly palpable. I had complete faith in the separate functions of the legislature, the judiciary, and the executive, at both the State and Federal levels, and I was certain that checks and balances were inviolable and occurred on a routine basis. But alas, you were 15 once as well. Don't hold it against me. Now I know better.

Yet, as I became this fierce, assertive force on Smith Hill I started to draw attention to what they really wanted to talk about: DCYF. People were asking me questions, and they were tough questions. One state legislator even tried to adopt me. Whenever one of the reps or senators would see me later in the evening walking the corridors of the State House jokingly ask if I had school the next day, I would say, "I wish!"

I tirelessly fought for the rights of kids in DCYF care from dawn until the wee hours of the morning in the Rhode Island State House hearing rooms, offices, back rooms, and rooms that the general public don't even know about. That's where legislators and civil servants try to legislate their way out of catastrophes that could risk the lives of Rhode Island citizens or, more importantly for some of them, sabotage their re-election campaigns.

Remember, the reason I had to leave my (rather lucrative state job as a 15-year-old) was because of my desire to wage "war with people who are trying to destroy kids' lives" as I stated in a November 2002 Sunday Providence Journal column by Bob Kerr. Unfortunately, those people were stronger than I could have ever imagined and the wheels in their tiny heads were beginning to spin — they had to find a way to get rid of me.

As a newly minted lobbyist, I spent hundreds of hours in Committee hearings — including the Committees on Health, Education and Welfare; Judiciary; Oversight, and many others. I frequently ran into Mike Burk. His creepy balding head and butchered Yosemite Sam moustache occasionally half-glared at me. The fact that we were now wearing same lobbyist badge annoyed the hell out of him. So did the fact that most legislators were actually taking me seriously and consistently complimented me on being well-spoken and presenting well-structured arguments in support of or against a piece of legislation.

While Burk would jealously glare — which other reps and senators even mentioned to me because it was incredibly harrowing — I would just focus on whomever was speaking and the contents of the bill that was being debated.

Burk rarely spoke if ever, and the reason for that is because he sucks at public speaking. I'm not being harsh, I'm just being brashly truthful about a man who has made known his opinion about me for the past 20 years and now I'm finally opining on him. He can't properly start and finish a sentence, he has the most banal tone of voice one could ever stand to hear, and he would probably suffer a stroke if he dared to break his midwestern cadence and speak with even an iota of passion or gravitas.

Perhaps that's one of the reasons DCYF is in the state that it's in: there truly is a lack of enthusiasm, energy, and morale. Essentially Mike Burk on a Friday night. You can nearly hear the collective workforce of the Department sigh with one accord.

As a lobbyist, I didn't make a dime. My clients were myself and my thousands of peers in DCYF care. They obviously didn't pay very well, but I didn't complain. Legislators would feed me with the leftover catering after the committee hearings before I would return to the DCYF headquarters at the ironically-named 101 Friendship Street and be transported to whatever shelter or group home had a spare bed for the evening. At least the practice of placing a

kid in a different shelter or group home every night didn't come with some fake politically correct-sounding acronym like "SAFE: Sheltering Adolescents with Food and Education" because that would have been a blatant lie. It was the night-to-night program. And you would be given fast food. And you would sleep in a different bed every night surrounded by different people. Sometimes you would get hurt or abused. And that was your life. The only difference between me and everyone else in that program was that I went to the State House every day and tried to change that incredulous status quo.

Much to DCYF Director Jay Lindgren's despair, I was a constant presence in the House and Senate lounges. I would wait two hours for a committee hearing to end just to catch a legislator for two minutes to plead my case for their vote on a bill to protect children and adolescents like me who were orphans through no fault of their own. I frequented the banquet halls and barrooms where legislators and power-brokers gathered for campaign fundraisers and continued my push to reform the broken system.

DCYF was broken 17 years ago in 2002, but it's only as recent as 2018 that the public, governmental, and journalistic attitudes started singing the same tune: DCYF is in constant pandemonium and perpetual chaos, many of its employees are inept and incompetent, the social workers are assigned an inhumane number of cases, it removes far too many children from their homes and places them in far

more dangerous situations than they left, and no matter how many more millions of dollars are appropriated as the Department goes overbudget each year and no matter how many Directors are dragged in and kicked out as political pawns to shield the Governor, most recently Gina Raimondo, the cumulative results that DCYF provides to the community during each gubernatorial administration are consistently antithetical to accomplishing the Department's actual mission of caring for children, youth, and families, and even making a modicum of progress. Things are getting worse.

Simply put, Rhode Island DCYF destroys far more families than it saves or preserves.

I saw it from the inside as a 14-year-old orphan who was shuffled around from shelter to shelter in the infamous night-to-night program and sat in on the legislative hearings discussing that unethical, abusive, and negligent practice. To hear night-to-night discussed in legislative theory, Departmental justification by Mike Burk, and then public testimony decrying the practice, and then to subsequently participate in the program in practice as an orphan in DCYF care, knowing that just hours before the elected officials of my state called it inhumane and abusive, was surreal.

I surmise that you can start to see that my childhood and adolescence was, to say the least, rather complex. My adulthood has been even more colorful. These experiences

cannot merely be contained in one book. The conclusions that my colleagues and I reached while planning these writings essentially embrace a non-linear style of documenting my history that details different aspects of my life as an orphan and the stages thereafter in different volumes. This, the first, will deal with a case study of an out-of-state placement. I later lobbied for legislation that would prohibit this ghastly practice of placing Rhode Island orphans in places like Nebraska and Florida, and it was supported by the majority of the Rhode Island House of Representatives as signed co-sponsors. This is a rarity. But that bill never made it to the floor of the House. The sausage-making that is law-making and my efforts as a lobbyist will be discussed in another volume.

While I may no longer be the age of an orphan and am now an adult, I, like all adults, have had successes and failures. I do, however, still consider myself to be on that orphan-filled vagabond train of life, living with a sense of unrehearsed spontaneity. It is this Dickensian spirit that most orphans possess, this craggy magic bursting within us that pushes us ever further to the next train stop of life, listening for that whistle to blow until we are swept away in the next enthralling adventure.

The years have passed by quite quickly, and much to my detriment. I attempt to remain enticed by that bright, thrilling excitement of life, but with illness, tragedy, loss, and the shackles of the horrific abuse that I experienced as a child at the hands of the State, it is ever so difficult to live

and not feel as if death is nigh, to breathe and ponder one's last, and write and not be weary.

Accordingly, the best way to relay my experiences, to document my thoughts, to relay the facts, to share hilarious stories, to tell you about the sheer agony that I and so many others endured in the name of the State of Rhode Island's DCYF, to compare what it's like to starve naked in a locked "quiet room" in a facility hundreds of miles away from home is difficult, to say the very least. And then, a few short years later, to enjoy a meal with my Harvard classmates, among them the daughter of the president of the Seattle Seahawks, and another, a piano prodigy who played Carnegie Hall aged five, to have another shot at lobbying, to have regular pints of Guinness and meals with a Nobel Laureate, surviving a personal tragedy beyond the scope of my wildest dreams — the best way to communicate all of that is through several volumes.

How many? As many as it takes. We're honestly not sure yet. And who knows. There may be other interesting things that I do in the meantime. But I highly doubt that, and I feel that the quiet life is now the life for me. I had my chance as a glow-worm, but now I'm just a regular worm.

Some volumes of the books in The Orphan Chronicles will be rather brief and rightly called microbooks. Some will be considerable in size (for example, the one on Rhode Island politics — if I called that a microbook, there would be many confused looks headed my way as the current draft

is somewhere around 400 pages and not even close to its conclusion).

Some books will deal with tragedy and some will deal with triumph. I will finally reveal things that I've spoken about to very few. Some stories in the books will be about me. Some books will deal with poetry, art, literature, philology, and other things I've learned through the eyes of a Harvard student but more interestingly through the eyes of an ex-orphan Harvard student.

There will be stories about rich people, poor people, people I've loved, and people I've despised, and people I've despised and made up with. Many of you will be surprised to know that you're actually on the nice list and not the naughty one. In fact, there are far more people on the nice list than than the naughty one.

And there will be historical figures that will be appropriately illuminated in these upcoming books. My writing will thus be critical or complimentary, but assuredly, either way, well-deserved. Needless to say, my icons will have special editions. Those other sinister foes of humanity will be lucky to get a blink.

Some of what I write in The Orphan Chronicles will be entertaining. Some of it will make you cry. Some of it may bore you. You may learn a thing or two about a subject or a topic. Some of it, perhaps this volume, may be written hastily so as to explain the abuse I suffered without putting me at risk of an increase in the amount of

flashbacks and nightmares that I already experience on a near-daily basis. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a ghastly disease and I would wish it on no soul. Not even Mike Burk (even though he is vicariously responsible for the abuse, torture, and negligence I suffered in Nebraska and Florida). And some of it will be incredibly detailed for statistical accuracy and adherence to professional standards and best practices.

All of it, however, will be the truth. All of it will be worth reading. And that's what matters most.

NICHOLAS ALAHVERDIAN

October 2019

# CHAPTER 1

## HELLFIRE IN FLORIDA



"Hell is other people"
JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

The first thing I remember is the brightness of the sun. The blazing, white-hot sun, and then being whisked into a luxurious lobby. It was a welcome departure from the drab, impoverished climate of Omaha, Nebraska where I had spent the previous 24 months. As I sit and attempt to remember the month that I was sent to this hellhole in Florida, my mind is simply drawn blank. That's how overmedicated I was.

Let's move on. It was in 2004. I was 16 years old. I flew from Nebraska to Sarasota, Florida with my DCYF social worker and we drove up the massive Tampa bridge. I remember feeling so dizzy and very paranoid. I hadn't been in a car in about two years as I endured significant torture and was court-ordered out of the Omaha facility due to severe and persistent physical abuse and other atrocities. I had first been sent to the Omaha facility, Boys Town,

from my home state of Rhode Island, and the tragedies suffered in that hell-hole shall be discussed at length in another book in this series.

I was exiled from Rhode Island, my home, because I was becoming a political and publicity threat. And Florida was deemed far enough from Rhode Island to continue to keep me in exile where I could contact no soul who could help me after it became apparent that the state of Nebraska was closing down the facility in which I'd been placed because of significant widespread abuse and numerous federal and state regulatory violations.

Besides, the Boys Town cretins had become exhausted by my demands to protect my Constitutional rights and allow me to do what I was constitutionally protected to do. Rights including speaking with lawyers and filing civil or criminal court actions. Contacting the press. Contacting my DCYF social worker. Contacting state regulatory agencies in both Rhode Island and Nebraska. Contacting the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. And other rights that triggered action on my behalf due to the egregious abuse and negligence I suffered at Boys Town Intensive Residential Treatment Center. Put down the book and listen closely for a moment. Hear that sound? That's Father Edward Flanagan, the founder of Boys Town and depicted by Spencer Tracy in the eponymous 1939 Academy Award-winning film *Boys Town* rolling in his grave at the thought of what Father Val Peter did to his legacy. Thankfully, Peter's successor Father Stephen Boes

seems to have banned Peter from campus. He may, however, want to take a look at Matthew Peter, Douglas Spellman, and Pat Connell. They were a big part of the abuse and negligence that went on at the Boys Town Intensive Residential Treatment Center, and their activities will be discussed in a future volume of this series.

This was all followed by my employment with the State of Rhode Island General Assembly. In other words, the Omaha cowboys chose the wrong man to test their Freudian superiority complex. I knew the law and that frightened them. Which is why they settled my lawsuit against them years later for a rather substantial sum, as did many others.

Armed with diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), clinical depression, and dysthymia, the power players in Rhode Island who wanted me gone — and more than that, wanted me silent — had instructed the DCYF to exaggerate my conditions and mental state to find a place where I would remain far from home and unable to contact anyone via phone or postal service until I was 18 years old.

In other words, they wanted to keep me overmedicated in a locked residential treatment center until I would "age out of the system" when there was no justified reason, medically or psychologically, for doing so.

And they wanted me to be as drugged up as possible so as to not have the mental capacity to engage in any of the typical Nicholas Alahverdian behaviors that I would

typically exhibit such as phoning the courts, attorneys, and the press when something abhorrent, newsworthy, or constitutionally questionable occurred.

Why start this multi-volume series of books with what happened in Florida? Probably because it's the best proof that the power players in Rhode Island politics knew that what they were doing was wrong — and they continued to knowingly and needlessly keep me hundreds of miles away from home.

They knew they were sending me to a place that had several grand jury indictments issued against it, a place that had admittedly hired convicted child abusers, and a place that was owned by the now-defunct Psychiatric Solutions Incorporated (PSI) — an institution that was lambasted by governmental leaders, the press, and patients and families as a broken money-making machine that coveted profits and condoned people in their care.

PSI was widely slammed in the 2000s for operating a vast network of troubled facilities. It was a for-profit hospital corporation listed on the NASDAQ.

These PSI facilities, as I remarked in a Rhode Island State House press conference in March 2011 and confirmed in Pro Publica investigations carried out before, during, and after my admission in 2004, would follow this proven profit-making pattern: they would buy up troubled youth and adult residential treatment centers, cut the number of employees, increase the bed capacity, and then reap in the

profits — no matter the abuse and neglect suffered by patients or the psychological toll taken on their families.

The epitome of the PSI model as described above was implemented at the Florida treatment center that I was sent to, leaving me far from Rhode Island, but also far from the reality of attending any high school. This took things a step further. I could forget about acquiring any type of appropriate education before my 18th birthday. And to me, as education was literally *everything* to me, this was devastating.

This was crucially important to me as a 17-year-old with lifelong aspirations of attending an Ivy League university. I had not realized, in fact, I think my brain failed to allow me to realize that not only was I not getting an education, but I also wasn't preparing for the incredibly critical university admission test, the SAT. The thought of not attending university only worsened my spirit-sapping depression, PTSD, and dysthymia.

It would also threaten my will to live in a way that I had not previously experienced. Education was always my therapeutic retreat from chaos and pandemonium due to my rather traumatic upbringing. And now there was no refuge. Only the singular hope that somehow, some way, I would be excused from a traditional secondary education by a top-tier university where I would attempt to succeed and thrive with all of my might.

With this seemingly horrible hand of cards dealt to me, I was far from college preparation, far from Mar-a-Lago, West Palm Beach, or Walt Disney World. The only four things that the sunshine state could offer me — beaches, future presidents, filmmakers, and decent seafood — were well out of reach from behind the questionable barbed wire and locked doors (*again!* Why am I locked in a "hospital" when I haven't committed a crime and I am not dangerous to myself or anyone else?).

Far from both the rich and the poor, this NASDAQ-listed, for-profit, felon-hiring, barbed-wired kid jail next door to a Walmart where adolescents were sent without a jury trial or consistent state oversight was a purgatory that didn't seem to exist in this reality — it was a dystopian universe unto its own.

It was a place where adolescents readying for adulthood was not a priority but a running joke, as it was not uncommon for the staff to place bets on which patient would be a prisoner first and for which crimes. A place where the employees and patients formed rival gangs and held impromptu boxing matches and violent brawls, taking no prisoners. The matches ended when the loser was on the floor in the corner unconscious. As I said on The Buddy Cianci Show on 630 WPRO in October 2012, Manatee Palms was just like the film *Fight Club.* Manatee Palms was essentially a *Fight Club*-themed hotel.

And for people like me who never threw a punch, I learned to get to the corner quickly. Some would ask at this point, "Well why didn't you just not go to the gymnasium." The answer is simple. If you didn't go, you would get a shot of body-paralyzing, mind-torturing, and dystonia-inducing thorazine. Because you were noncompliant. That's how these sick fucking people operated. Either you do what we say or we fucking drug you up until you can't move anymore and you feel like you have 20,000 bee stings all over your body for the next two hours and then you refuse the next activity and we can give you another shot of this drug that's basically a throwback from the 50's. It's fucking insane. And it's responsible for several health problems that I'm currently suffering.

There were other events, in which I did participate, and even those couldn't go smoothly. One day early into my stay some genius thought it would be a good idea for a cohort of severely mentally ill people to watch the Michael Moore documentary *Bowling for Columbine.* I had personally seen this before and didn't think it was appropriate due to the fact that there were kids who were going to be watching this film and they were going to be significantly impacted in ways that might not be positive. But oh well. What authority did I have to say otherwise.

*Bowling for Columbine* elicited so much racial fury that the white minority among the staff and patients — solely me because I was the only white person among the staff and residents — would be a punching bag for a two hour

melee of 12 blacks and Hispanics beating me as if I was the embodiment of the white race for the past 1,500 years and responsible for the heinous sins committed against them and/or their ancestors.

Welcome to Manatee Palms Youth Services.

Manatee Palms (which, in 2011, *The Providence Journal* accurately described as 'deceptively named"), wholly owned and operated by PSI, was a dumping ground for kids from around the United States that had "severe behavioral problems".

Remember — my diagnoses at throughout my life were and remain to this day as follows: depression, dysthymia, and PTSD. I had become an orphan because my family had disintegrated, my mother was a severe alcoholic and drug addict, and I hadn't had any contact with my biological father since the age of 7 (and for the record, I still haven't).

But Manatee Palms is where I ended up.

I did not have any "behavioral problems" let alone "severe" behavioral issues. If granting interviews to the press about a broken foster care system or demanding a consistent public school placement and testifying before House and Senate committees are "behavioral problems", them I confess to being behaviorally problematic. But I wasn't. I was simply a political and publicity problem to lifetime bureaucrats with six figure salaries and/or pensions with connections far and wide who were tired of seeing the Department for which they were responsible be slammed

by a 14-year-old punk like me in the newspaper and on the 6:00 news.

Of course, the State of Rhode Island Family Court, led by Chief Judge Jeremiah S. Jeremiah, conveniently had one of his staff psychiatrists certify that I had something known as "conduct disorder" — something that I was never diagnosed with previously or since — which qualified me as an eligible candidate for Manatee Palms after things were becoming murky in Omaha when Nebraskan state regulators became involved after constant abuse and torture was discovered and Boys Town was ordered to shut down the controversial and abusive program to which I was admitted. The Court's staff psychiatrist also claimed "oppositional defiance disorder" — which is hilarious, because if, say, I'm on the debate team, (like I was at one of the 12 high schools I attended in 3 months as a result of the 12 cities in which I resided in the night-to-night program), isn't being oppositional and defiant a good trait? Protecting and defending your argument? I was quoted in a November 2002 article in *The Providence Journal* that I wanted to be a lawyer, journalist and a politician. All of those things require some sort of opposition and defiance. Obviously if you're getting abused or neglected, you have to oppose and defy that abuse and neglect with all of your might. And if you fight for your rights as a foster kid at the people's house in your state like I did at the Rhode Island State House — just like unions, minorities, gay rights activists, and all of the other people who have marched, screamed,

and shouted in unison in the aesthetically beautiful rotunda bursting with the world's most beautiful murals — you have opposed or defied some force or power that was denying them a right or oppressing the other parties heretofore mentioned.

There were kids being moved from night-to-night to different shelters. That was my argument. My conduct revolved around fixing this broken system. I was oppositional and defiant because we deserved a daily education, three meals a day, and a stable living space. Prisoners had a better deal with the State of Rhode Island than the kids like me in the night-to-night program.

We couldn't go to school. They were giving us KFC, McDonald's, or Burger King for dinner when they actually had the donated vouchers. If they didn't have the vouchers, then you would starve. Don't believe me? There were plenty of kids in the night-to-night program and I know that they would tell you the same as I have. The conditions were brutal. Sitting in the lobby of a bureaucratic building with 20-year-old murals on the wall with ancient *National Geographic* and *Sports Illustrated* magazines? And then the kid walks out of the building — because who on earth, even in 2003 before kids had cell phones, wants to be stuck in that situation for 16 hours a day — and they go to downtown Providence where they are exposed to unhealthy influences like drugs and prostitution in Kennedy Plaza or Burnside Park. Their DCYF social worker marks them as AWOL until they are found or return to the DCYF building.

Me? I went to the State House. That was my refuge. I worked, and then when there became a conflict of interest because I was lobbying more than I was working, I lobbied. So if I was oppositional or defiant at any point because I didn't want to eat tax-payer funded fast food nor did I feel that it was in my best interest to sit for 16 hours in a State office building and I decided to go to work at my job (where your bosses, the elected officials are, and *where I know you don't want me to be)* or if I decide to testify as a lobbyist how dreadful your Department is because you can't even get kids to school or find them a foster home within a six to eight month time period, then that's too goddamn bad. If it's oppositional and defiant according to the criteria of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders at the time (the DSM-IV, which I read when I was 12), then so be it, because of course I am going to oppose and defy "figures of authority" when they tell me I don't have a stable placement to go to, I can't go to the same school everyday, I can't go to my medical appointments set months in advance. You're not a figure of authority. You're a figure of weakness making the State look bad.

Anyway, back to Manatee Palms. The admission standards of Manatee Palms weren't exactly as stringent as what I would experience when I successfully applied for admission to Harvard. However, the faux "conduct disorder" and "oppositional defiant disorder" for the aforementioned political activism and advocacy helped,

even though they were misnomers). Because this is a PSI facility — remember, profit first, safety later, no matter the personal cost — essentially if the state from which you came was willing to pay the $350.00 or so per day that it cost to be "treated" at Manatee Palms, you were on the next flight toward Walt Disney World. However, there would be a slight detour with the final destination being a hellish dystopia as opposed to a Magic Kingdom of any sort.

You wouldn't be met by a friendly anthropomorphic mouse. There would be no cotton candy with swirling teacup rides and exhilarating jaunts down Splash Mountain. No. You were at Manatee Palms. You would be met with punches. And kicks. And sexual assault. And fecal matter thrown at you. And urine in your food. You didn't even need an upgrade for those perks.

So why would Judge Jeremiah S. Jeremiah want to send me all the way to Florida, and before that, to Nebraska? Well, it all started when I began to be invited by members of the Rhode Island Democratic Party to be active in politics — both city- and statewide. We'll save the interesting story about how I temporarily found myself in the political spotlight and started working for the government for another volume in this series, but for now, let's go back to how Judge Jeremiah slowly continued to ruin my adolescence.

Jeremiah, a Republican, was a judge appointed by Governor Edward DiPrete. DiPrete and Jeremiah go way

back. Jeremiah served as DiPrete's city solicitor when he was Mayor of Cranston, Rhode Island. When DiPrete was elected and took office as Rhode Island Governor in 1985, he brought Jeremiah along as the Executive Counsel — the Governor's official lawyer and a top advisor.

DiPrete served as governor until 1991, when millionaire businessman Bruce Sundlun (a Democrat) finally managed to unseat him after two previously unsuccessful attempts.

Corruption was rife in the DiPrete Administration. DiPrete himself ended up serving eleven months in state prison for bribery, extortion, and racketeering after pleading guilty in December 1998.

Because Jeremiah's appointment as a Family Court Judge (along with a hefty six figure state pension) led him away from the corrupt forces of the DiPrete Administration, Jeremiah was able to escape most of the scrutiny that other DiPrete associates had the privilege of enduring.

Regardless of whether or not Jeremiah should have been included in the DiPrete corruption probe, the fact that this decades-old friendship, professional relationship, and mutual backscratching that led DiPrete to make a gubernatorial appointment for his old friend Jerry Jeremiah is not a coincidence. As longtime Rhode Island child advocate Anne Grant called the relationship between DiPrete and Jeremiah, it was simply the "Cranston cabal" working its political witchcraft.

Indeed, the appointment of Jeremiah most certainly wasn't because he was an expert in Family Law or a champion for poverty-stricken, destitute Rhode Islanders with significant family crises. It was a political appointment that would make Machiavelli shudder. Jeremiah was brash, harsh, mouthy, ill-mannered, and bad-tempered.

A brute at his core, Judge Jeremiah S. Jeremiah frequently bullied the children, parents, and adolescents that appeared in his courtroom on the fifth floor of the J. Joseph Garrahy Judicial Complex, and one was often left bewildered as to why a loud man with such a poor temperament was allowed to pass judgment on vulnerable Rhode Islanders and make decisions significantly disrupting their lives when he could barely contain his fury, impatience, and unhidden disdain for the caseload on his ever-growing docket.

Sure, Jeremiah needed the advice and consent of the Rhode Island Senate for his judicial confirmation, but Jerry had been playing the game long enough to be confirmed without a second look by a single senator especially at *that* time in *that* Rhode Island.

Jeremiah S. Jeremiah's judicial career was rife with corruption and tolerance of abuse and negligence. He routinely phoned up journalists and screamed in his faux, worked-up baritone voice to "kill the story" whenever

someone dared report on a critical aspect of the Rhode Island Family Court.

But there was a gentler side to Judge Jeremiah. Especially when he was showered with gifts, praise, and good food. These offerings mostly came from out-of-state congregate care providers looking to court Judge Jeremiah and then-DCYF Director Jay Lindgren to capitalize on Rhode Island's lack of housing for all of the children and adolescents that DCYF had been removing from family homes at an unprecedented level with the lowest rate of social workers per capita and one of the highest caseload ratios in the United States.

These for-profit "treatment facilities" and "hospitals" provided Judge Jeremiah and Jay Lindgren an overview of their clinical offerings with luxury dining, golf weekends, sight seeing, and five star hotel stays. After their hard work on behalf of the State they were allegedly meant to be representing, Jeremiah and Lindgren had significant leisurely time with the "hospital" executives and only at the conclusion of these envious occasions did Jeremiah and Lindgren put pen to paper and commit a certain number of Rhode Island children to each for-profit, out-of-state treatment facility.

Rhode Island had a deficit of these newly popular "residential treatment centers" such as Manatee Palms for adolescents with special behavioral needs. No need to worry, they said. These corporations, would look after the

kids under Jeremiah's custody as a judicial officer of the Family Court. These caring people with a knack for providing loving service to otherwise unloved kids would provide that service.

I'm trying to picture how these discussions would ensue if I was present "But wait. Rhode Island never had locked buildings where people couldn't leave unless they were imprisoned or profoundly mentally ill." Don't worry about that, they would say, that's just for security. So the kids don't leave. So we can *take care of them*. Whatever that means.

"And as for our treatment plans? Doesn't it matter if the kid hasn't been there before, has no family there, and if there is an estimated end of treatment date — that's the point. The longer these kids stay as "patients" because they are "seriously mentally ill" (read: in the night-to-night program for too long, too old to be fostered or adopted in Rhode Island's too few foster homes, and chose to act out because an admission to pediatric neuropsychiatric hospitals Bradley Hospital and Butler Hospital would ensure a temporary safe placement with healthy food, education, and caring nurses and floor staff for at least a few weeks) — the bigger the profits. That's the point. It's a corporation. It's not a nonprofit. They report to the shareholders and that's it — as long as money is being made by the people who are investing, that's all that matters."

Call me insane, but this is how corporations work. And sure, you can say that the children or adolescents can complain about service delivery, but if you're prohibited from writing letters or calls, or on the rare chance that you do have a phone call with someone you desperately shout, "Please, please get me out of here, I am being tortured by…" the kind clinical staff will simply disconnect the line, claim the patient was having a breakdown and they are now in the quiet room (left naked and locked in a windowless, dark room with no ventilation) and have been given an intramuscular injection of thorazine in the buttocks. Bingo. The profit is kept. The patient is silent. All is well.

And as with any corporation, the bottom line mattered the most. Jeremiah and Lindgren never visited the facilities once the youth were admitted to facilities located in places such as Florida, Texas, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania. All Jerry knew was that he had wonderful opportunities to travel, stay at fancy hotels, and be lavished with praise for his "work" on behalf of Rhode Island's children and families. That meant these facilities were "state of the art" and "the best in the nation."

No, Jerry. They were profit-making enterprises. They didn't show you how they treated the kids, they showed you a good time so you would get kids who were fighting poor conditions out of Rhode Island and into a locked facility where they can't leave, call the police when they are hurt, send a letter, contact a lawyer, or their DCYF social worker. That's why they treated you to first class

flights, Michelin-starred dinners, glossy brochures, spa days, and golf. They don't treat the kids that way.

Who knows, maybe the senility hit him earlier than the doctors thought.

The only plausible explanation is that these tools of typical business deal-making were employed in an effort to appeal to Jeremiah, the chief decision-maker about where these children and adolescents with allegedly significant behavioral disorders would be placed (as opposed to a foster home or group home in Rhode Island).

Even more damningly, it almost acts as a preemptive act of penance to a State leader about why their particular for-profit, understaffed, underfunded, ill-equipped facilities that had far too many patients were the best possible options when considering where Rhode Island's children and adolescents would be placed. Convincing the Chief Judge of a Family Court of a State that removes children from their homes and families at a rate higher than the national average (and Rhode Island's rates have been disproportionately higher since nationwide statistics started to be recorded) to pay hundreds of dollars per day per child to stay at their hell-like facility would be hard work, wouldn't it?

Well, spa day, golf rounds, and Michelin-starred dining or not, Judge Jeremiah *did* take hundreds of kids and send them hundreds of miles away from their families and friends. These were no longer kids. They were

commodities. They were used as a statistic in an algorithm to calculate whether or not their "treatment needs" would continue to produce a profit. These so-called "patients" were now overseen not by caring individuals that provided reports to parents — the reports were only to stockholders. There was literally no motivation to indicate that a patient was progressing or whether he or she was improving or not — because empty beds mean lower profits, and lower profits mean angry shareholders. The kids aren't alright — that's the line they took for each and every one of them because every bed equals a steady profit. A bonus for the nursing management and the mid-level management. Hell, maybe something for the frontline staff at Christmas too. And that's the way it was going to stay because, apparently, goddamnit, over the cold dead bodies of the CEOs of these corporations would an adolescent be discharged from their "hospital" before the age of 18 even if they showed any sign of improvement if it indicated any loss of a penny of potential profit.

And Judge Jeremiah and Jay Lindgren fell for the perpetual capitalist child care cycle. Cash for everyone. Well, until the kid turns 18. But that doesn't matter, because there will always be dysfunctional families. More kids will arrive at the doorsteps of these endless cash cows. And even if a child or adolescent doesn't necessitate the top tier of treatment, there will always be a psychologist or psychiatrist compensated by the Court to say otherwise. And the cycle continues.

Jerry didn't totally escape scrutiny before his death in 2015. After serving for decades at the helm of the Family Court, he was censured by the Rhode Island Supreme Court, became the subject of multiple federal and state misconduct allegations (particularly to the truancy court program which launched a major U.S. Department of Justice investigation), and had several decisions overturned by the Rhode Island Supreme Court in quick succession. This occurred after he reportedly began suffering from senility on and off the bench until his forced retirement in 2010.

So when Judge Jeremiah sent me to Florida, it wasn't because Manatee Palms offered some type of specialized treatment or miracle drug that was offered only at their facility in Florida's Gulf Coast, it was because I was challenging him and his team in the Family Court, as well as the DCYF and its leadership. And PSI probably sent him on a tour of some of their facilities and threw in some or more of the aforementioned perks.

Remember the quote of Dr. Liebman of the Harvard Kennedy School? "DCYF is the most messed-up agency I've ever seen." If you didn't agree with him earlier, or you still thought the DMV had a fighting chance, what are your thoughts now?

When I began to acquire significant media attention in mid-to-late 2003, exile was the only option, and it went without saying that at places like Boys Town Intensive

Residential Treatment Center and Manatee Palms, one was not allowed to go to school, apply to college, speak to a lawyer, contact the clergy, file a complaint or motion with any court, or report abuse or negligence to the police. Which is exactly where Jeremiah wanted me to be. And because the State, at the direction of Jeremiah and Jay Lindgren, was paying $300-$500 per day for me to stay hundreds of miles from Rhode Island in their locked purgatory, those CEOs and clinical managers were willing to do whatever they were asked or even instructed — lawful or not.

Given his past association with a governor who showed the same lack of respect for the law, Jeremiah's constant acts of condoning state and federal laws and regulations are not surprising. Unfortunately, Jeremiah and his team were not the most ethical of people. This goes without saying based on the fact that he served as Executive Counsel to a Governor who was later convicted of serious crimes. DiPrete and Jeremiah were best friends for decades. Jerry's loyalty was rewarded with a high-paying lifetime appointment to the Rhode Island Judiciary. To argue that one failed to benefit from the other's crimes, however slight, is tantamount to insinuating that Tom Brady would have won 5+ Super Bowls for the Patriots without any receivers or offensive backfield members. When he ascended to the Chief Judgeship of the Rhode Island Family Court, Jeremiah was the referee on the field when the local high school teams came out to play, and he fixed

every call, had a cut from every bet, and knew how to eject and silence anyone who dared question his call or judgment. You could ask for an instant replay and that would be enough to warrant a ten year suspension. He was the judge, jury, and executioner. Jerry loved his fiefdom But it damaged the lives of generations of Rhode Islanders.

We'll get more to my overall experience with Jerry and friends later, but let's get back to Florida.

I suppose the reason I keep circling the runway on the Florida issue is simply because of how goddamn awful it was there, in that pit. I have intentionally tried to forget most of it, but let's talk about what I do remember. It's difficult to talk about this, but here we go.

# CHAPTER 2

## ROUND ONE! DING!



"Sure the fight was fixed. I fixed it with a right hand."
– GEORGE FOREMAN, ON HIS FIGHT WITH MICHAEL MOORER

I'm not a fighter. Never have been and never will be. The esteemed residents (or "patients" if you want to believe that this place was a bona fide hospital) of Manatee Palms Youth Services in Bradenton, Florida certainly loved a good fight. Some of them would make Mike Tyson look like Mr. Rogers.

Here's what I remember when I walked into the facility. The lobby was extremely luxurious. Overstuffed sofas, a selection of soft drinks, an ice machine, a selection of current periodicals. As my Rhode Island DCYF social worker and I sat in this strange Floridian lobby, the admissions representatives came out to greet us. We were ushered into another vast room with a large boardroom table and the three of us sat in the far corner, as if the

remainder of the table was reserved for the twelve apostles and Christ himself.

Knowing what I know now, I wish they made an appearance.

A litany of paperwork was completed, most of which I didn't fully comprehend because I was still drugged up from the Nebraskan psychiatrist's cocktail of drugs. Again. Depression. PTSD. Dysthymia. Those were my diagnoses.

But in order to get admitted to what would amount to the antithesis of a country club, one had to have other diagnoses from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) supplant or supplement one's actual diagnosis as a matter of instituting overblown "treatment" plans and pharmacological concoctions. In other words, they needed to justify the brutality.

After we finished the paperwork, I was given the opportunity to bid farewell to my unknowing social worker. She headed back to Rhode Island while I remained in this foreign place of sun and sin, and as I would soon learn, there would be countless instances of abuse, negligence, assault, torture, and other atrocities.

I was placed on a unit with seventeen other boys. There was one other from Rhode Island, three from Washington, D.C., and a few from Texas if my memory serves me correctly.

The surroundings were a far cry from what I had experienced in the lobby, which was clearly solely for show. There were holes in the wall, as a result of the other boys punching them. I distinctly remember glancing at their fists and seeing the blisters and bruises that proved that the fist had met the wall with purposeful, destructive force.

I have always been a voracious reader, so I attempted to locate the nearest bookshelf. No such luck.

As this was a locked unit, and because I could not leave, you could say I was imprisoned there. I began to realize that even people who are actually detained in "real" jails have access to books. They also have access to phones, and paper with envelopes accompanied by postage stamps, don't they? Why was I being cut off from the outside world?

Another boy saw me looking around. He had a thick southern accent and a rather threatening gait.

"Where ya goin' boy?" he asked.

"I was just looking for some books to read," I replied.

He stared at me with dark eyes, the color of coal. His mouth made a gesture as if he was going to burst out laughing and then suddenly it transformed into fury, and then back to one of hysteria. I was scared.

"I ate all of the books," he answered.

I slowly backed away and said, "okay, I am sorry."

I'm 16 years old at this time, and I remember, a week into my stay, I sent about ten handwritten letters to Universities across the nation and asked them for viewbooks and applications. Unfortunately, the overnight worker was unaware of my ban to access the U.S. Postal Service (to be honest neither was I) and because he admitted to sending the letters for me, he was fired and the viewbooks were kept in a cardboard box in the staff office until I was discharged in June 2005. That was the Manatee Palms Youth Services approach toward education. They made it known there and then. Besides, the thorazine they injected in my ass everyday made me forget all about university.



There were three shifts. The first was from 7:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. The second shift was from 3:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m. And the third shift was from 11:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m. Between the hours of 7:00 and 3:00, there would be about thirty-eight of us were placed in a room too small for thirty-eight boisterous male adolescents.

There was a "teacher" at the head of the "classroom." His job was essentially to hand out workbooks allegedly accredited by the State of Florida for us to work on throughout the day.

Without fail, there would be fights everyday. Fights over whom was the rightful owner of a pencil. Fights over which boy was looking the wrong way at another boy.

Fights over whether or not one accidentally or intentionally brushed up against a desk when trying to navigate through the cluttered, overcrowded "classroom."

Within a week, it was my turn. Everyone had their so-called "honeymoon period" where they didn't risk the attention of physical abuse from their peers. But when my time came, it came with a bang.

I was never a big teenager. I never fought back. I didn't know how to fight. I always ended up with a bloody nose and a black eye. I think for the year or so that I was in Florida, rare was the day when my eyes and nose were not injured in one way or another.

Bruises covered my body perpetually. At night, the older, bigger kids began to assault one another. Some of the employees maintained couple-like relationships with the patients.

Others were simply assaulted under threat of further physical abuse or a detrimental report which would eliminate the ability to access "privileges" (i.e. dessert, television, candy, and other immaterial carrot sticks used to compel the patients to comply). This happened to me on several occasions, including once when I was raped by a staff member named Rhonda.

She was charged with a crime when I reported what she had done to me, and she accepted a plea deal, pleading guilty, thankfully sparing me the pain of reliving that particularly painful incident during a trial. Her confession

was published in the local newspaper, and she admitted her guilt, yet she still continues to work in the health care industry to this day.



Manatee County, Florida paid a hefty price for each "student" that was attending Manatee Palms. I later learned that hundreds of thousands of dollars was spent, and that this was earmarked for our education. Where this money actually went, I haven't a clue, but I can confirm that we never had any lessons, we had no textbooks, we had nothing.

The "classrooms" weren't even equipped with chalkboards. I remember reading on the internet years later during the lawsuit I filed against Manatee Palms that each student was entitled to an education that was substantively similar to the students who were enrolled at the local high schools.

Why we weren't allowed to go to public school, moreover, why *I,* a gifted student with a sky-high IQ (when the testing was conducted in 2002 at age 14, the examiner said I possessed a "genius-level IQ and should consider being admitted early to university") and a graduate school reading level wasn't permitted to go to public school while in Florida, I will never, ever know.

Perhaps the whole thing was a big cash grab. I do know for a fact that the employees were paid next to nothing.

Most of the employees were recent high school graduates, not much older than the patients (who were all between the ages of 13-17). Both the staff and the patients acted and spoke like they were from the gang community.

It was claimed on multiple occasions that I "set myself up" for things such as torture and abuse (and when I say torture and abuse, I mean fingernails and toe nails being ripped from their respective nail bed after being strapped to a board kind of torture and abuse, among many other things) because I enjoyed reading and classical music. That was the causation. Reading. And classical music.

The other residents would frequently beat me, immediately going for my nose, constantly choking me and trying to grip their hands around my throat and the tubes therein, and the staff would join in as well.

Throughout my tenure there, I am only aware of two employees being fired for their behavior against me. They were incredibly violent, but ironically and unfortunately, the employees who were the most violent and the most abusive escaped without any disciplinary action because it took place where CCTV could not see the behavior.

The only reason the two employees were terminated was because their behavior was captured on CCTV.

Sadly, this went on for months and months. When my DCYF social worker finally came to see me at some point in 2005, she realized what had been happening and she took immediate steps to have me removed from that

facility, but it involved getting a court order from the now-senile Judge Jeremiah, and it didn't come quick.

# CHAPTER 3

## WHY?



"I lost the angel who gave me summer,
the whole winter too."
– FRANK SINATRA "WHEN I LOST YOU"

During those months at Manatee Palms, I was so lost. I am at a loss for words when I attempt to describe how or why I ended up in Florida — where I had no relatives, friends, or otherwise any familial or social system.

I also found it incredibly defeating to accept that I was placed in a treatment center for people with serious mental illnesses. I recall speaking with the doctor on the unit for the first time — Bellino was his last name, if I recall correctly — and apparently he was retired, served on a Board of Directors for a bank, and was paid a hefty sum to spend five minutes every other week with each patient so that it could be documented that the "patient" saw a "doctor." He freely admitted this. Every appointment thereafter saw medication added or increased. I was never tapered off any of the drugs he so carelessly prescribed.

When I say zombie, I was a zombie. I could barely walk. Forget reading. I could no longer form an intelligible sentence. As my DCYF social worker said when she saw finally visited me in early 2005, I was "a shadow of a shadow of a shadow" of my former self.

Let's get one thing straight — there was no doctor-patient relationship. This was blatant pharmacological torture. When I returned to Rhode Island in June 2005, my longtime psychiatrist, Dr. Jeffrey Hunt of Bradley Hospital, had to slowly taper me off of the dangerous near-homicidal cocktail of drugs that I had been prescribed. To this day we are still in awe that I survived that amount of medicine and that I was able to return to some semblance of being a healthy and active human being after suffering so much.

These nurses and doctors — if they were even certified, as the checks system was nonexistent according to the Pro Publica news reports — had no idea what they were doing. I recalled that on two separate occasions I had dystonic reactions to drugs that they had given me — with the threat that they would be injected if I refused to take them orally.

Dystonic reactions are something that you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. Imagine your upper jaw curling up against your lower jaw on one side and then imagine a sensation of the jaw then beginning to consume itself. It is the most painful side effect that I have ever experienced — and it was all for being treated with drugs that there was no need for me to be taking, because again, I had depression,

PTSD, and dysthymia. Not these invented diseases to keep me in these facilities to stop me from contacting the media, the courts, applying to universities, and doing other things that any 17-year-old would normally do to prepare for adulthood.

I'm not saying that the Rhode Island DCYF and the Family Court were the sole actors in keeping me out of state for as long as they could. They were not the sole actors in this criminal pandemonium. Because hypothetically, even if there was nothing wrong with me, and the Manatee Palms doctor relayed that to Rhode Island DCYF, Manatee Palms and PSI would lose that profit that I was making for them until the bed was filled again, which would have a potential impact on their stock price based on how closely the shareholders monitored bed capacity and hospital population. I was a commodity. Thus, Manatee Palms had no aspiration to discharge me even if I walked on water, turned water into wine, and fed the entire patient population with the finest fish and bread that I fashioned out of a single loaf and a can of tuna. They would simply chalk it up to psychosis because it's out of the norm to perform such miracles.

Let's talk about the thorazine (chlorpromazine) they consistently injected into me on a daily basis. Essentially, because I was so drugged up, I would be unable to get out of bed because I couldn't function. Anyone on the amount of medication — especially unnecessary medication — that

I was on would not be able to function like a normal human being.

Needless to say I would have trouble getting out of bed in the morning. So the Manatee Palms staff, being the geniuses that they were, decided that the best course of action if I was, in their interpretation, "refusing to leave my bed", was to inject me with thorazine in my buttocks — a very dangerous, horrible, mind-numbing drug — strap me to a gurney, take me to a windowless, closet-like room, restrain me on the floor, strip me naked, and leave me in the triple-locked room for the entirety of the day without any food, water, or medical assistance.

How, how on earth did this happen? This will be discussed in other books in this series, but less than two years prior I had been working for my state legislature. I had dreams of attending Yale or Harvard. I wanted the best for my life.

But because I was a publicity threat, I had to be kept as silent as possible. And unfortunately, this cohort of individuals in Rhode Island were successful in keeping my mouth shut. Let me explain.

In addition to several other factors which will be detailed in other volumes in this series, I discovered in 2002 through a colleague at the Rhode Island State House that Judge Jeremiah's chief of staff, David Tassoni, did not have a law degree. That wasn't it — he didn't even have an undergraduate degree. But he was mediating divorce cases

and sitting as a court-appointed magistrate at the direction of none other than Jeremiah!

My source told me to confront Jeremiah with the information — which I did. Jeremiah knew that by now I had amassed a rather large rolodex of contacts in the press, especially for a fifteen-year-old.

So when I learned this information, and when I learned other compromising details about Family Court and DCYF employees and practices (such as the fact that the Department had restarted the night-to-night program behind the back of the Rhode Island House of Representatives despite promising that it was no longer being used), I was going all in.

I did what no 15-year-old in their right mind would do and I went to New York City alone the week before Christmas with a twenty dollar bill in my pocket and wearing the only suit I owned.

Once I reached Manhattan, I went to each of the major news networks and newspapers to speak with producers, receptionists, and researchers. I was armed with documents and proof of the corruption, abuse and negligence that was ensuing in the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families.

I scheduled appointments with producers from NBC's *Today* show as well as *The O'Reilly Factor* on Fox News among other networks. Those were the two shows that confirmed my appearance during the first episodes of the

New Year. The other appearances were to be solidified within the coming weeks.

I finished my work on Christmas Eve. Everything was sorted out, and I was excited. One of the producers bought me a hotel ticket for my final evening in Manhattan so that I didn't have to sleep on the subway again.

I made my way back to Rhode Island with train tickets in hand — paid for by a television host himself — for the appearances in January. All I had to do was keep quiet and let Jeremiah (who bore an uncanny resemblance to Jabba the Hut) enjoy his Christmas feast. And then I would strike.

Unfortunately, Jeremiah had been tipped off that I was meeting with the press locally — WJAR (the NBC affiliate), WPRI (the CBS affiliate), and *The Providence Journal* had all done stories on me again — yet Jeremiah had no idea about the national news that was about to break. And he wouldn't, because he single-handedly killed the stories without even knowing they were going to be aired.

He had the power to keep me from contacting anyone after placing myself in a secure facility in Rhode Island until I could be flown to Nebraska. I was literally Court-ordered to not leave the youth shelter and the staff were similarly ordered to not allow me to use the telephone, send letters, or leave the property. I was devastated.

Said another way, he proceeded to deem me a threat to myself because I was "not complying with my treatment" — that was always their go-to excuse when I arranged to have the truth about the abuse and negligence inherent in the DCYF and the Family Court illuminated in the press and the court of public opinion.

Thus, he had me sent to a supervised shelter that I was unable to leave until I was sent to Nebraska in mid-2003, preventing me from any further contact with any media network — local or national.

After all, Jeremiah was the one that was unwilling to order me to be placed in a permanent foster home in an effort to remain in one school district so that I could attend the same school school each day, every day.

If there was anyone that wasn't complying with any unwritten "treatment plan", it was Judge Jerry. He acted within his own sphere and his own fiefdom. He reported to no one. And while he was alive, he was never formally disciplined.

Perhaps an appropriate remedy awaits him in the afterlife, but who am I to judge?

# CHAPTER 4

## KNOCKIN' ON HEAVEN'S DOOR



"Give me liberty or give me death!"
– PATRICK HENRY

So here I am, from early- to mid-2005 walking around like a zombie, waiting for my Rhode Island DCYF social worker to acquire an order from Judge Jeremiah to remove me from Manatee Palms. She knew I was a vegetable. And I am only beginning to come to terms with publicly discussing that now.

Days blended together. Sleep eluded me and my nights were numbed by the thorazine. Drooling became commonplace. Never in my life had I suffered problems with my motor skills, but here I was, not knowing how to tie my shoes. Not being able to write. Not being able to comprehend what I was reading.

I must admit, I cannot definitively say that Judge Jeremiah, David Tassoni, Mike Burk, Kevin Aucoin, or any of my other political adversaries knew with a surety that that's how I was going to turn out, but I cannot fathom why

I would be sent to not one but two states out of Rhode Island, where I was allowed to contact no one, and was constantly abused and neglected. Manatee Palms was closed by the State of Florida both before and after my admission as was the Boys Town Residential Treatment Center by the State of Nebraska. Clearly there was something wrong with those facilities and I shouldn't have been sent there in the first place.

If my work as a Rhode Island General Assembly Legislative Aide or my later work as a lobbyist provided any ammunition to these or any other individuals because I wanted to ameliorate the Rhode Island DCYF, I cannot understand why such dire consequences had to be suffered by me and my brain and my body.

All of this happened before the age of Twitter and Facebook, and I guarantee that if I was experiencing now what I did then, I would be able to end it quicker and draw eyes nigh to the problems that seemingly continue into perpetuity because I could record the video and audio of these outrageous, abusive, and tortuous hellholes where I was nothing but a commodity to a bunch of shareholders.

I suffered everyday at Manatee Palms. It was so long ago. Bloody noses everyday, bruised body, hurting all over, pain everywhere. No relief.

But sometimes, even now, at night, I wake up, and I am ever so still as I fear that I am still there, still being beaten with a baseball bat, still having feces shoved down my

throat and smeared across my face, still being injected with thorazine in my buttocks, still being sexually assaulted, still being held against a wall with one hand tightly gripping my neck as my feet dangled below, still having urine poured on me in my sleep, still being kicked, punched, locked alone in a windowless dark closet ironically called "the quiet room" without food or water for days on end. Still. Still. Still.

This was a political consequence. There is no question in my mind. As a whistleblower of the conditions in DCYF, they had to take my whistle away. Judge Jeremiah did that by sending me to places where I was prohibited from using the phone, sending letters, filing lawsuits, pressing charges, or doing anything to protect my interests and rights.

The question that must be asked now is whether or not this still continues today. When children and adolescents are sent far from their home states where they have no relations or social/familial networks, are they still being prohibited from postal correspondence? Are they denied the ability to bring civil or criminal charges when they are abused and neglected? Are they allowed to phone lawyers, the police, their social workers, their family or the clergy?

These issues need to be addressed and it is within the purview of each state legislature in the United States, the governor of each state, and each state judiciary system to review their role and ensure that they are doing their part to protect children and adolescents that otherwise wouldn't have a voice.

Children and adolescents in state care may not be able to vote and they may not donate to campaigns or organize at the ballot box, but they are in the custody of the state to which you swore an oath. Legislators, judges, and governors need to start looking after children as they would their own.

Never again should a child be used as a commodity like I was and be sent to a facility hundreds of miles away with previous grand jury indictments issued against it for widespread abuse and neglect only to be left for dead for months. Never again should the only report that is most frequently sent or received when a child is in care consist of a balance sheet to a shareholder or board of directors.

It's despicable. I lost my childhood. And Manatee Palms, PSI, and its successor companies are responsible.

Furthermore, the onus is also on the federal government to ensure that federal regulatory measures undergo routine compliance checks. Without this essential federal oversight, state actors that may not be conforming with current federal regulations are able to circumvent the law thus condoning further child abuse and negligence within statewide social service systems.

No one wins, except the shareholders. Thus, in my calculation, you have money made on the successful yet illicit imprisonment of children and adolescents without straightforwardly calling it imprisonment, instead concealing it with the gentler "treatment" term. You have

made a profit on the virtual imprisonment of a youngster when no crime has been committed but you've arranged to have them drugged up to the point of cognitive oblivion and thus they are to remain in your care to the tune of multiple hundreds of dollars per day lest they are discharged which of course your psychiatrists do not recommend and would be a discharge against medical advice because there would be no continuity of care. So you would need a court order, yes. And no, it certainly has nothing major to do — well, something perhaps, but nothing major to do with profits and empty beds. We may fill it by the end of the evening.

When the bed is filled again, the cycle repeats itself. You keep the child under lock and key, you take the money, and you deprive the child of education. You drug them up until they forget their name. You staff the facilities with inexperienced thugs not much older than the population they're meant to serve, having just attained a high school diploma or its equivalent, something your patients will never achieve. Perhaps. Perhaps not.

Or that patient will earn a GED, get admitted to Harvard, learn how to write from the best professors on earth, befriend a Nobel Laureate, regain their academic, political, philosophical, and intellectual strength, and live to tell the world about your depraved profit-making enterprise that thrives on chaos, lies, and iniquitous retention advocated by psychiatrists who are in on the game and hold

the same. God. Damn. Shares. To. Become. Wealthier. Through. Forced. Fictional. Psychiatric. Treatment.

In further volumes of *The Orphan Chronicles* I will detail more about regulatory reform and how governmental oversight can stop bad actors like these and persuade potential and/or reluctant whistleblowers to give testimony about current conditions through legislative and Congressional subpoenas.

# CHAPTER 5

## THE MANATEE PALMS MEMO

*This memorandum was sent by*
*Nicholas Alahverdian following a request from*
*Governor Lincoln D. Chafee's*
*Office for Legislative Affairs in 2011*

This memo will attempt to convey the abuse that I suffered at the hands of employees of Manatee Palms Youth Services, financed by the State of Rhode Island. On a comparative scale, if what I've experienced were hurricanes, these situations would be most aptly be characterized as a Katrina-like set of incidents and storms with no help from the government (or at least until I was rescued by my Rhode Island social worker with whom I credit with saving my life). These incidents, comprehensively and cumulatively, forced me into a state of severe existential despair; however, this response shall focus on the physical suffering that I sustained during these injurious and and hurtful occurrences. That said, notwithstanding the emotional abuse, I will focus on the physical abuse and its effects while not dismissing said emotional damage.

An assault exacted upon me merely a week into my stay at Manatee Palms was only the tip of the iceberg. An employee of said agency, Jason William, did strike me repeatedly in a violent and vile fashion. The expression on his face was pure fury. Repeatedly, he struck me fiercely, each blow varying in agonizing aching pain. I specifically recall after each pounding thrash the pulsating and palpitating physiological stinging, the throbbing, gnawing instant soreness even as my screams pleaded with Jason to stop. Each punch was deliberate and each kick as I lay on the ground, screaming, concomitantly caused further physical discomfort.

I recall fellow patients observing this incident in a state of shock. The looks of terror only heightened my already elevated anxiety. Each whack, kick, and jab met my face with vigor, with every sturdy strike radiating from excruciating to intolerable. I felt sore for weeks. My bruised body sustained what can most aptly be characterized as the utility of an industrial punching bag. The inflammation, redness, and sensitivity around the areas where I was struck by Jason gave my body a shoddy, inferior sensation, bringing my definition of corporal pain to an advanced and unfamiliar magnitude. This was only the beginning.

The culture of Manatee Palms was not unlike that of what is exhibited in the film Fight Club. The excessive, nearly inhuman paradigm of assault from Jason, Justin, Leroy, Marty, Cliff, and Richard only enhanced the

permissibility of fights solely among patients. I specifically recall my endurance of pain to systematically increase upon each demonstrative occasion of a brawl. At times, the bashes and clobbers would propel and evolve to a state of restraint, typically following two to two and half minutes of pure and unadulterated punches and kicks. Comparatively, the restraints were, from an obviously abstract point of view, more comfortable due to the lack of frequency of strikes which were replaced with the restriction of body movement.

The instances of the "necessity" of fighting and subsequent restraints were initiated by various motives with the objective of inflicting pain on my person. Such activity as that of refusing to go to bed or follow an instruction provided to them what was a warranted rationale to initiate a violent melee complete with the onslaught of assault. The bombardment of smacks and whipped fists provided not merely an alternative to the instigation of the introductory phase of restraint, but suitably and advantageously permitted the assaults to appear to the senses solely as the common struggle and scuffle to physically coerce the patient (i.e., me) to violently land on the floor.

The staff, composed of many recent high school grads and many thugs who talked incessantly about gangs and crime, were particularly infuriated when a staff member named Rhonda was fired, due to the fact that she sexually molested me, which she later admitted to and was fired for (as well as pleading guilty in court for this crime).

Apparently, Rhonda had been friends with many of her fellow staff and my honesty was detrimental to her retaining employment with Manatee Palms. Justin kicked me in the groin several times, punched me, and choked me the day after I shed light on this sinister violation of trust and professionalism. Many other assaults followed. Rhode Island Family Court waited a few more months before my social worker was finally allowed to rescue me from this torture.

As my tolerance for pain grew, so did my assertiveness against the staff who inflicted it upon me. I persistently attempted to inform the administration of Manatee Palms of the daily and nightly explosions of violence. Therapists and the doctor never inquired about the blackened bruises from especially violent brawls, the discoloration formed an enveloping, intrusive layer of contusions.

The violent conflicts would last anywhere from two to two and a half minutes of the purest pain. These frequent battles were regularly accompanied by vicious and wicked verbal assaults- choice names such as “sissy,” “wimp,” “bitch-ass,” “motherfucker,” “white-ass bitch,” “cocksucker,” and “punk-ass bitch” were some of the more frequently used monikers. The kicks and punches were often verbalized in step with the syllabic structure of the words; that is to say with the utterance of each syllable, it was not uncommon for each verbally assaulting syllable to be met with its physical counterpart of a punch. For example, “punk-ass, bitch-ass, white-ass motherfucker”

would be a particularly harsh mash-up of syllabic assault intertwined with eight respective hits.

As the quarrels ensued, so did my subconsciously wrought explications meant to clarify the purpose for being attacked. As I lay on the ground screaming and crying, nose bloodied, tears sloping downward, I became accustomed to the systematic, nearly mechanized process of assault, restraint, and subsequent lockup in the "quiet room," more often than not accompanied with a hearty dose of a chemical sedative.

The physical discomfort that I suffered was incalculable. As I mentioned earlier, my body would literally have a coating of blackness, purpleness, yellowness, and redness, hues I had never seen and colors I thought my body was incapable of producing. The ungodly frequency of migraines from hits in the head, which seemed to be Leroy's favorite place to strike, was nearly unbearable. The joint pain, swelling, and sometimes immobility became a burden. It would become painful to stand from straight blows to the stomach, painful to walk from hits in the knee, painful to sit because of jabs to my ribcage, and uncomfortable to lie in the relative security of my bed due to my back being stepped on with steel-toe boots which Cliff seemed quite fond of.

I believe I would be a formidable contender for the competition of most nosebleeds in a one year period. All too often my clothing would be splattered with blood, I

would wake up in the middle of the night with a pillow that took on fire-engine red appearance. Accompanied by the most arduous migraines, my nose would bleed and bleed. Not only was that a favorable place for the fellow patients to attack me, but it seemed to Leroy that I favored being hit in the face because he did it so often.

The disguise of struggle in anticipation of a restraint to mask the assaults does not adequately describe the strategic paradigm with which the assaults were employed. The forceful strikes were in such frequency that I do not believe I went a day without being bruised or attacked for a four to six month period. The daily coating of skin discoloration would be impossible to acquire solely from professional, therapeutic, safety-minded restraining measures. The dichotomous polarity of what this cohort of staff maliciously committed and what they were trying to imply are two opposing and dissimilar undertakings.

My body became one with the pain. The only way I feel that I can most aptly characterize this abhorrent infliction of pain on my person is to describe the pain as the antithesis of happiness, the polar opposite of elation. The suffering and agony necessitated that I develop physical coping mechanisms that would justify the assaultive nuisances that were recurrently transpiring. My body learned to interpret the pain as a distorted configuration of euphoric interpretation. Said another way, my body learned to welcome the pain instead of attempting to avoid it as it

became such a habitual, daily (sometimes hourly) occurrence.

The seemingly preferred method of a fight would usually follow this formula:

One: A provocative event meant to disrupt the "stability" of the group of patients would occur. Typically, an instruction (some of which I viewed as pointless or issued with malice) would be given, and I would object. On many occasions, probably the most common dilemma that I faced was obtaining or retaining college view-books and application materials that were confiscated due to their "irrelevance to my treatment plan."

Two: An alternative would be given, such as an escort to the "quiet room," more often than not peppered with curse words.

Three: I would object to the alternative and attempt to peacefully discuss the issue.

Four: A final warning would be given and I would typically remain seated while the staff members proceeded to kick me, grab my arms, punch me, in three instances bite me, grasp my neck so tightly that I felt as I was being deprived of oxygen, jab me in the chest, punch me in the nose, apply force to a pressure point, step on my hands, kick me in the face, place me on the ground with my stomach to the floor yet arms acrobatically holding down my own head, and multitudinous other forms of the most

flawless, definitive forms of physical pain that went beyond my most dismal and pessimistic expectations.

Five: After a couple of solid minutes of sheer terror, a restraint would ensue, a nurse would be called to administer a sedative, and I would be left for dead in the "quiet room."

The unfortunate reality of this pain was the fact that I needed to constantly reassure myself that it would be the last time, always justifying the attacks as being my fault. The seemingly borderline personalities of the staff members were startling.

There was no grey area- it was rather binary; that is to say my behavior would be good or bad, and they came to work seeming to expect to initiate an impasse of my desire to meet their expectations. The kicks to the face and jabs to the chest were administered in even the most inferior situations, such as requesting more food or a drink of water after bedtime; the events would simply depend on their mood. The seemingly consistent vengeful attitude taken on by Richard and Justin would often result in the most simplistic requests being turned into the most complicated fights.

Richard, Justin, and Leroy (or any combination of the three) often worked as a team on the same shift. The vindictiveness with which they approached their responsibilities was abhorrent, I was frequently startled that their immaturity would be carried into the workplace. They

seemed to have a particular impulse to exact revenge upon any patient who dared cross their path.

Cliff, in addition to his frequent sexual jokes and references, was notorious for assaulting patients during restraints. I know Cliff was fired for his behavior. His harmful behavior led me to pain on many occasions. His preferred manner of diabolical assault was to get me to ground as quick as possible and step on my face while alternating with blows from his fist.

Cliff's monstrous acts were among some of the most despicable, leaving me with countless bruises, migraines, sore body parts, and a significant amount of occasions where I had trouble breathing due to the breath being knocked clear out of my lungs with the force of a bat to a baseball.

Marty was not an actual employee of Manatee Palms, he was one of the 15 or so staff from the "agency," a temporary staff support firm that provided logistical support to the facility. Marty would be annoyed at the slightest of adverse circumstances, often simply slapping me. Marty was probably the least abusive of this cohort.

As I mentioned earlier, the incident with Jason was the tip of the iceberg as this initial assault sparked a chain of assaults that continued until the day I was court-ordered out of the facility. Justin was particularly and devilishly vengeful as he and Jason were friends.

Richard also committed acts of retribution, albeit his were less severe than Justin's and were often only committed in the presence of Justin, often invoking the "esprit de corps" or *comitatus* of their united force against the white, minority patients.

In conclusion, my days at Manatee Palms were dark and filled with destructive and harmful behavior. Never in my life did I expect to be so horribly and atrociously hurt. The sinister paradox of being hurt by the people paid to take care of me was and is startling and disturbingly astonishing. I may have physically recovered from these assaults, but I sometimes have phantom pains and frightening phenomenons where I visualize the blackening and purpling and yellowing of my skin where the bruises acquired by Manatee Palms staff once were. They are invisible bullet wounds of the most terrorizing battle I've ever experienced.

Regards,

Nicholas Alahverdian

# CHAPTER 6

## OBITUARY

*Nicholas Alahverdian died on February 29, 2020 after a battle with non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma complicated by pneumonia at age 32*

**Nicholas Alahverdian**
**July 11, 1987 - February 29, 2020**

Nicholas Alahverdian's battle for life ended on February 29, 2020. The children and families in the care of the Rhode Island Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) for whom he inspired and led through turbulent government transgressions have lost a warrior that fought on the front lines for two decades. Mr. Alahverdian died two months after going public with his diagnosis of non-Hodgkin lymphoma. He was in his 32nd year.

At the bedside were Mrs. Alahverdian, their two children, and extended family. His last words were "fear not and run toward the bliss of the sun." At the time of his passing, the room was filled with the sounds of the end credits for the 1997 film "Contact" by composer Alan Silvestri, a film and score which held special meaning for Mr. Alahverdian.

Mr. Alahverdian was a devout Roman Catholic. In keeping with Mr. Alahverdian's wishes, his earthly remains were cremated with his ashes scattered at sea.

Statesmen and stateswomen in the House of Representatives and Senate joined with Mayors across Rhode Island in homage to a man whom they acknowledged as "one of the most vocal, outspoken and constructive advocates for reforming Rhode Island's DCYF and the child care system" and a "fighter in spirit but a peacemaker in practice" for two decades. His name, when uttered in memoriam in the House and Senate Chambers and City Halls throughout the Ocean State, was a fitting tribute as those were the spaces where Alahverdian labored as a warrior for those without a voice for two decades commenting on not just issues surrounding the Department of Children Youth and Families, but also business, health, public safety, and education.

Providence Mayor Jorge O. Elorza remembered Mr. Alahverdian as "a beloved community leader whose selflessness and lifelong contributions to the residents of the State of Rhode Island have earned him the unwavering admiration and respect of many."

WPRO News, the first news organization to announce the death of Mr. Alahverdian, was a base for him over the years as he told Rhode Islanders of the devastation suffered by children in care on The Buddy Cianci Show, The Dan Yorke Show, and on Steve Klamkin and the

Saturday Morning News. The family express gratitude to these journalists, as well as to Bob Kerr, Walt Buteau, Parker Gavigan, and Dan McGowan who all became close confidantes in Mr. Alahverdian's two decade war on DCYF to spark its overhaul and reform.

As the world comes to a halt due to the coronavirus, the public memorial service will be planned at the end of the pandemic and details will be published on the official Alahverdian Center for Child Welfare Facebook page at www.facebook.com/nicholas.alahverdian as well as at nicholasalahverdian.com

Rhode Island politics, which are often fraught with tension, were put aside when House Speaker Nicholas A. Mattiello remembered Mr. Alahverdian from the House Rostrum following the introduction of a House Resolution in his honor, unanimously supported by the entire House of Representatives. Earlier in the month, the House adjourned with a moment of silence in memory of Mr. Alahverdian

Alahverdian was a product of the Providence Renaissance, never forgetting the Ciancian transformation of an industrial city to a cosmopolitan destination where one was proud to be from Providence. He enjoyed a great friendship with the late Mayor Vincent A. Cianci, Jr.

Mr. Alahverdian was a painter, author, amateur ornithologist, political scientist, sociologist, accomplished orator, and child welfare reform advocate.

He spent 20 years in the House of Representatives and the Senate, where he not only served as a state employee at the age of 14, but also provided lawmakers with insight into the abusive DCYF practices which have sparked calls for reform from all four corners of Rhode Island as he was abused in DCYF care simultaneous to his employment with the government. Alahverdian left his employment to became the youngest lobbyist in Rhode Island history as he fought for DCYF reform and was then exiled to Nebraska and Florida where he was silenced until his 18th birthday.

Surviving what Providence Journal columnist Bob Kerr called a Dickensian existence in Rhode Island and enduring war-like torture in Nebraska and Florida was a triumph of sheer will. He overcame severe beatings and rapes and the facilities were ultimately closed after Alahverdian shined a light on the abuse. Alahverdian continued his crusade against DCYF abuses until his death, and with merely two weeks prior to his untimely passing, a bill creating a DCYF oversight commission was introduced in his honor by Rep. Ray Hull as the stories about DCYF horrors continue to be reported and published.

He again did the unthinkable and was admitted to and became an alum of Harvard University, the most peaceful and intellectually invigorating four years of his life aside from the past four years with his young loving family including his beloved wife and cherished children.

Mr. Alahverdian leaves many friends ranging from the world of politics to music to business and beyond. The family thank with utmost gratitude Dr. Jeffrey Hunt, Bob Kerr, the Hon. Ray Hull, Hon. Bob DaSilva, Hon. Joanne Giannini, Hon. John Lombardi, Hon. Anastasia Williams, Hon. Maryellen Goodwin, Hon. Josh Miller, Hon. Allan Fung, Hon. Sheldon Whitehouse, Hon. Jeffrey Pine, the professors Dr. John Hamilton, Dr. Theo Theoharis, Dr. Thomas Underwood, all of Harvard University; Rhode Island Music Hall of Fame artist Rudy Cheeks, friends Saling Simon, Leah Cooke, and Leslie Twining, and countless others who filled the last third of his life with love, joy, excitement, and wonder.

Besides his immediate family, Mr. Alahverdian's survivors include his uncles Michael and Edward Alahverdian, his cousins Michael, Melissa, and Neil; and numerous siblings, half-siblings, nephews, and nieces.

Condolences to the family can be sent to info@nicholasalahverdian.com or at the online condolence book on EverLoved.com

# CHAPTER 6

## NEWS ARTICLES & PROCLAMATIONS, RESOLUTIONS & CITATIONS ISSUED TO THE FAMILY OF MR. NICHOLAS ALAHVERDIAN

When Mr. Alahverdian died, it was a national news story. With coverage ranging from the Associated Press to *The Washington Times,* and many other newspapers, television stations, and internet websites including MSN.com. His family were sent condolences from the mayors of many Rhode Island cities, and Mr. Alahverdian was honored in the House of Representatives and the Senate. In the pages that follow are samples of those articles and honors.



Associated Press
Child welfare activist dies of cancer
March 3, 2020

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Nicholas Alahverdian, who grew up in foster care and went on to become a vocal critic of Rhode Island's child care system, has died of cancer. He was 32.

Alahverdian died Saturday after losing a battle with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, according to his obituary.

"He lived a warrior's life," the obituary reads. "A fighter in spirit, but a peacemaker in practice. He overcame significant abuse and harmful living conditions."

Alahverdian was an outspoken critic of the state's use of out-of-state facilities for children under the care of its Department of Children, Youth and Families.

He testified before state lawmakers about being sexually abused and tortured while he was shuffled from temporary shelters in Rhode Island to residential facilities in Florida and Nebraska.

"It's an inhumane approach to a human problem," Alahverdian told The Associated Press in 2011. "We have the ability to provide for them here. And we're spending all this money to ship them across the country."

Alahverdian later sued the state and his alleged abusers in a federal lawsuit that was settled in 2013. He'd also worked as a legislative aide in the State House and attended Harvard University.

State Rep. Ray Hull, a Providence Democrat, filed a resolution last month in honor of Alahverdian that calls for the creation of a House oversight commission to investigate treatment of children in state care.

Alahverdian is survived by his wife and two children.

https://apnews.com/aec7a7d76cadbf56e69686899ea2659d

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NBC News — Channel 10 WJAR Providence
Rhode Island child welfare reform advocate dies of cancer
March 3, 2020

Rhode Island child welfare reform advocate and author Nicholas Alahverdian, 32, died on Saturday after a battle with non-Hodgkin lymphoma, his family said in a statement to NBC 10.

Alahverdian overcame a troubled childhood in the custody of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, and went on to fight for DCYF reform.

He caught the attention of lawmakers when he claimed he was abused and tortured during out-of-state placements in Florida and Nebraska, eventually exposing dangerous living conditions for children. He later sued those alleged abusers and state officials. The case was settled.

Alahverdian's obituary said he "lived a warrior's life, (and was a) fighter in spirit but a peacemaker in practice."

After working for the General Assembly as a page and a legislative aide, Alahverdian attended Harvard University. Just weeks ago, legislation spearheaded by Providence Rep. Raymond Hull (D) was introduced, that would create a House of Representatives oversight commission on DCYF. The bill is pending.

He leaves behind a wife and two young children.

https://turnto10.com/news/local/rhode-island-child-welfare-reform-advocate-dies-of-cancer

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CBS News — Channel 12 WPRI Providence
Child welfare activist, DCYF critic loses battle with cancer
March 2, 2020

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (WPRI) — Nicholas Alahverdian, a longtime critic of Rhode Island's child

care system who alleged he was “tortured and raped” in DCYF-approved group homes, died Saturday after losing a battle with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

Alahverdian, survived by his wife and two children, was 32.“He lived a warrior’s life,” she said. “A fighter in spirit, but a peacemaker in practice. He overcame significant abuse and harmful living conditions.”

Alahverdian filed a federal lawsuit in 2011, alleging he was sexually assaulted by group home residents and employees as he said he was “shuffled” through several Rhode Island, Florida and Nebraska facilities by the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF).The lawsuit was settled in 2013, but the details were not disclosed.

Last week, Alahverdian said he was hopeful about a resolution filed in the Rhode Island House of Representatives by Providence State Rep. Raymond Hull, calling for a commission to study the treatment of children in DCYF custody.

“This is something that’s been needed since I first proposed it years ago,” Alahverdian said. “[DCYF care] has only gotten worse since then.”

https://www.wpri.com/target-12/child-welfare-advocate-dcyf-critic-loses-battle-with-cancer/

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WPRO News — 99.7 FM — A Cumulus Station
Child abuse victim Alahverdian loses his cancer fight
March 2, 2020

Nick Alahverdian, a foster child who fought against abuses in Rhode Island's child care system, lost his battle with cancer and died on Saturday. He was 32. He leaves his wife and two children.

"No words can express what has happened," she said, adding he was admitted to a hospital on Friday, the cancer had impacted his kidneys and his lungs, and he died on Saturday.

Alahverdian, a former House page and legislative aide sued the state, claiming that he was assaulted and abused while in DCYF care, and placed out-of-state. The suit was settled in 2013.

Alahverdian revealed in January he had been diagnosed with late-stage non-Hodgkin lymphoma and told he likely had just weeks to live. He redoubled his efforts at reforming the state's child care system and Department for Children, Youth and Families.

"Unfortunately, this has come much too soon in my life," he told WPRO News at the time. "I'm only 32 years old and I wish I had the ability to live much longer to accomplish the things that I set about to do so

many years ago," he said.

In February, Providence Rep. Raymond Hull filed a resolution on Alahverdian's behalf, calling for the creation of an emergency, one-year House commission to investigate treatment of children in foster care. The measure is still pending in the House.

"He was always such a person that had energy and life, and belief in his cause, and that was being a warrior for foster children," his wife said. "Rhode Island and the world have lost someone who really went to work for children."

She said that in keeping with his wishes, he would be cremated, his ashes scattered at sea.

"He always had a real affinity for the ocean," she said.

https://www.997wpro.com/2020/03/02/child-abuse-victim-alahverdian-loses-his-cancer-fight/

**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND**

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY
JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2020

**2020 — H 7994**

**HOUSE RESOLUTION**

EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES
ON THE PASSING OF NICHOLAS
ALAHVERDIAN

Introduced By: Representatives Hull, Mattiello, Filippi, Shekarchi, and Lombardi
Date Introduced: March 11, 2020
Referred To: House read and passed

WHEREAS, It is with sadness that this House has learned of the untimely passing of Nicholas Alahverdian, the beloved husband to the love of his life whom he affectionately referred to as "my daisy," a devoted and loving father to his two children, and an accomplished author and passionate child welfare reform advocate; and

WHEREAS, Nicholas Alahverdian spent much of his youth in the foster care system. During his years in the custody of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, he endured significant abuse, deprivation of education, neglect and harmful living conditions. The challenges he faced throughout those years could have irreparably shattered his life but instead, those hardships gave him understanding, passion, and drive; and

WHEREAS, More than a survivor, Nicholas endured and ultimately overcame his years in the system to become a Harvard-trained sociologist and political scientist, an accomplished author, and for two decades, one of the most vocal, outspoken and constructive advocates for reforming Rhode Island's DCYF and the child care system; and

WHEREAS, Putting in marathon hours devoted to reform, Nicholas had worked with four DCYF directors, spent hours in General Assembly committee hearings, and was described as "A fighter in spirit but a peacemaker in practice"; and

WHEREAS, In addition to his family, writing and crusader for reform, Nicholas was a devout Roman Catholic who loved to sail, paint and read, and ornithology; and

WHEREAS, Nicholas Alahverdian led "a warrior's life" fighting for some of the most vulnerable children

in our state. Sadly, he lost his final battle against non-Hodgkin Lymphoma following complications with pneumonia but he will surely be remembered by those whose lives he strived to improve and in the hearts of those he loved; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, That this House of Representatives of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations hereby extends deepest condolences on the passing of Nicholas Alahverdian; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to transmit a duly certified copy of this resolution to Mrs. Alahverdian and Family.

*View the House Session including remarks from Speaker Nicholas Mattiello and Representative Raymond Hull at* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBjjXpqPEFs

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The Senate Resolution has been prepared but was not available at the time of publication of this volume due to the fact that it has not been read and passed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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# Citizen Citation

*In Memory of*

# Nicholas Alahverdian

*I, JORGE O. ELORZA, Mayor of the City of Providence,*
*do hereby confer upon you this citation*
*in memory of Nicholas Alahverdian, a beloved community leader*
*whose selflessness and lifelong contributions to the residents*
*of the State of Rhode Island have earned him the unwavering admiration and respect of many.*
*Nicholas was a tireless advocate for the voiceless and disenfranchised,*
*and he continues to be an inspiration to all who had the privilege of knowing him.*
*The citizens of Providence and myself join with Nicholas' family and friends*
*in celebrating the life of this extraordinary man.*

*Given under the Seal of the Mayor of the City of Providence*
*this 19th day of March, 2020.*

MAYOR OF PROVIDENCE

**CITY OF PROVIDENCE**

**CITIZEN CITATION**
**IN MEMORY OF**
**NICHOLAS ALAHVERDIAN**

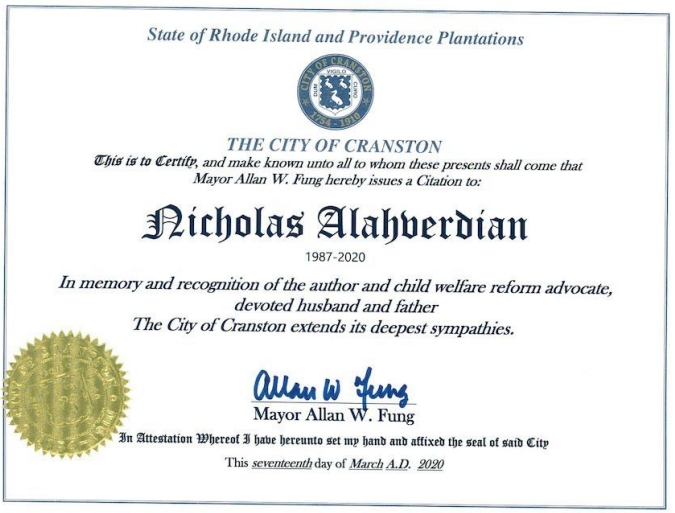
I, JORGE O. ELORZA, Mayor of the City of Providence, do hereby confer upon you this citation in memory of Nicholas Alahverdian, a beloved community leader whose selflessness and lifelong contributions to the residents of the State of Rhode Island have earned him the unwavering admiration and respect of many.

Nicholas was a tireless advocate for the voiceless and disenfranchised, and he continues to be an inspiration to all who had the privilege of knowing him.

The citizens of Providence and myself join with Nicholas' family and friends in celebrating the life of this extraordinary man.

Given under the Seal of the Mayor of the City of Providence this 19th day of March, 2020.

JORGE O. ELORZA
MAYOR OF PROVIDENCE



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

THE CITY OF CRANSTON

This is to Certify, and make known unto all to whom these presents shall come that Mayor Allan W. Fung hereby issues a Citation to:

Nicholas Alahverdian

1987-2020

In memory and recognition of the author and child welfare reform advocate, devoted husband and father
The City of Cranston extends its deepest sympathies.

Allan W Fung

Mayor Allan W. Fung

In Attestation Whereof I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of said City

This seventeenth day of March A.D. 2020

**THE CITY OF CRANSTON**

This is to Certify, and make known unto all whom these presents shall come that Mayor Allan W. Fung hereby issues a Citation to:

**NICHOLAS ALAHVERDIAN**

1987-2020

In memory and recognition of the author and child welfare reform advocate, devoted husband and father the City of Cranston extends its deepest sympathies.

**ALLAN W. FUNG**

In Attestation Whereof I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of said City this seventeenth day of March A.D. 2020

# City of East Providence

## In Memoriam

Be it hereby known to all that the Office of the Mayor extends its sincerest condolences and expressions of sympathy on behalf of the City of East Providence to

**The Alahverdian Family**
On the passing of
**Nicholas Alahverdian**



Roberto L. DaSilva, Mayor

March 20, 2020

**City of East Providence**
**In Memoriam**

Be it hereby known to all that the Office of the Mayor extends its sincerest condolences and expressions of sympathy on behalf of the City of East Providence to

**The Alahverdian Family**
On the passing of
**Nicholas Alahverdian**

Roberto L. DaSilva, Mayor
March 20, 2020

**Whereas,** Nicholas Alahverdian, age 32, author and child welfare reform advocate, died on February 29, 2020, losing his battle with non-Hodgkin Lymphoma. He was surrounded by his loving family including his cherished wife and beloved children; and

**Whereas,** Nicholas lived a warrior's life. A fighter in spirit but a peacemaker in practice, Nicholas survived life in Rhode Island's child welfare system, the Department of Children, Youth and Families, which he fought so hard to reform; and

**Whereas,** Nicholas overcame significant abuse, deprivation of education, and harmful living conditions. Amazingly he simultaneously worked for the Rhode Island General Assembly as a page and then as a legislative aide. He was able to give lawmakers an eyewitness account of what it was like to grow up in such dangerous state-funded conditions in group homes and shelters; and

**Whereas,** as a result of his acumen for drawing legislative attention to important issues, Nicholas suffered the ire of DCYF, where he was sent to Florida and Nebraska and tortured in ways that truly shock the human conscience. Both placements were later shuttered, and Nicholas sued his abusers and the state officials responsible for his abuse; and

**Whereas,** Nicholas attended Harvard University, learning from the best professors in the world, and furthering his life's work of being the best person he could be in what he saw as an insane yet fixable world. He spent two decades attempting to spark reform of the RI DCYF; and

**Whereas,** just two weeks prior to his death, in honor of Nicholas, State Representative Hull along with Rep. Lombardi, Rep. Bennett, and Rep. McLoughlin introduced a bill to create a House of Representatives Oversight Commission on DCYF. The bill is pending in the House, with the hope that this year it will pass.

**Whereas,** Nicholas' strength and confidence preceded him, and he poured his spirit and energy into the democratic process in which he so strongly believed; and

**Whereas,** Nicholas loved sailing, ornithology, painting, and was a voracious reader. He was a devout Roman Catholic. He doted on his children, always a loving father working relentlessly to give them the family and childhood he never had the opportunity to experience. He loved his wife more than life itself, always referring to her affectionately as "My Daisy."

Therefore, I, Mayor Lisa Baldelli-Hunt, honor

**Nicholas Alahverdian**

and the stellar life lived so well on behalf of the rights of children in our state, we honor Nicholas' life with utmost gratitude on Thursday, March 22, 2020.

SEAL OF THE MAYOR

Lisa Baldelli-Hunt

Mayor Lisa Baldelli-Hunt

Whereas, Nicholas Alahverdian, age 32, author and child welfare reform advocate, died on February 29, 2020, losing his battle with non Hodgkin Lymphoma diagnosed last year following complications with pneumonia. He was surrounded by his loving family including his cherished wife and beloved children; and

Whereas, Nicholas Alahverdian lived a warrior's life. A fighter in spirit but a peacemaker in practice, Alahverdian survived life in Rhode Island's child welfare system the Department of Children, Youth and Families, which he fought so hard to reform; and

Whereas, Nicholas overcame significant abuse, deprivation of education, and harmful living conditions. Amazingly he simultaneously worked for the Rhode Island General Assembly as a page and then as a legislative aide. He was able to give lawmakers an eyewitness account of what it was like to grow up in such dangerous state-funded conditions in group homes and shelters; and

Whereas, as a result of his acumen for drawing legislative attention to important issues, Alahverdian suffered the ire of DCYF, where he was sent to Florida and Nebraska and tortured in ways that truly shock the human conscience. Both placements were later

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Therefore, I, Mayor Lisa Baldelli-Hunt, honor
**Nicholas Alahverdian**
and the stellar life lived so well on behalf of the rights of the children in our state, we honor Nicholas with utmost gratitude on Thursday, March 22, 2020.

LISA BALDELLI-HUNT
MAYOR
CITY OF WOONSOCKET

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nicholas Alahverdian (1987-2020) was a Harvard Univeristy political scientist and sociologist. His primary scholarly focus was the intersection of philology, anthropology, rhetoric, and politics.

Alahverdian was renowned for his work in reforming systemic problems in state foster care programs. Alahverdian's studies, academic analyses, and legislative solutions are cited in local and national media.

He died in February 2020 of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma complicated by pneumonia.

The Nicholas Edward Alahverdian Press can be reached at neapress@protonmail.com and www.nicholasalahverdian.com




NICHOLAS
ALAHVERDIAN